Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Ron Behar

SUMMARY

This three-part oral history traces Ron Behar's life from his childhood in wartime London to his eventual settlement in the United States. Ron recounts growing up in a Sephardic Jewish family during World War II, describing the Blitz, evacuation, antisemitism, family traditions, military service in the Royal Air Force, and his decision to emigrate in search of new opportunities. He reflects on his experiences traveling and working across the United States, witnessing racial segregation in the Jim Crow South, building a career in the carpet and furniture industries, and raising a family within the Jewish community in Seattle. Throughout the interviews, Ron shares personal stories of resilience, immigration, entrepreneurship, family, and loss, offering a vivid account of a life shaped by war, cultural heritage, and perseverance.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: All right; we're recording.

Ron Behar: Oh, I see, yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: May I have your consent to record this interview?

Ron Behar: Absolutely.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: My name is Ruth Kodish-Eskind, and it is, let's see, March 24th, 2025. And we're in this, TheirStory room. Do you want to say your name and where you're located right now?

Ron Behar: I'm Ron Behar, and I'm located in my house, at the kitchen, at the counter, having banana bread and tea.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: That's great. So, what's your full name, and have you had any other names in your life?

Ron Behar: No. Ronald is my full name.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Do you know the story of your name?

Ron Behar: The what?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: The story of your name, or where it came from?

Ron Behar: Oh, yes. You see, my actual name is Aaron, and my mother was infatuated with Ronald Coleman, who is a very famous British movie star, and so she told her husband she's naming me Ronald. So, there we go.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Will you say where and when you were born, and if there's any stories about your birth that you're aware of?

Ron Behar: Well, only what my mother told me, in that my father already had four children and didn't want any more. And so, he brought home special pills for her to take to get rid of me. But she flushed them down the toilet. So that was her way of keeping me alive. I was born February 28, 1934, in London. Yes, I do remember where, too, but it's just in West London. It's just one of

those famous Queen Charlotte Hospital. And that's all I can tell you about my birth, except that little story about Dad trying to get rid of me.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes. So, you had four children...

Ron Behar: And I was the last one.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Say-say it again?

Ron Behar: I was the last one of five children.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Who were your siblings?

Ron Behar: I had a brother who was 13 years older than me, and I can understand why my dad didn't want any more. And I had a sister that was three years younger than him, and another sister that was two years younger than her, and another sister that is, she's 90, she's still alive. She's 93. And she lives in Washington, D.C.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Can you describe your house growing up, who was around, what was the energy of the house like?

Ron Behar: Oh, it was a very energy-filled house. It was full of music. My brother played the piano beautifully, and we all got around the piano and sang and danced, and it was really a good, fun household. I don't have a single negative thought about my childhood that I could relate to you, because it was great. And if it hadn't been for my sisters and brothers, I could never have come to America.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: What songs did your brother play on the piano?

Ron Behar: Oh, my goodness. He played all of Sinatra's songs. He played songs from the 30s, too. He played boogie-woogie, if you know what that is. He played some classical music, too. He was a very talented, artistic man. He was in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and survived, thank God.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Were other members of your family musical?

Ron Behar: Yes, in the sense that they were all musical, including me. Yes, we were all into dancing, into music, into jazz, into concerts, whatever.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: What did you play?

Ron Behar: I didn't play anything. I'll tell you why, too, because my mother gave my brother private lessons, and then she started giving private lessons to my sisters, the older ones, and they all ran away when the teacher came. So, she said, "That's it. I'm not giving any more lessons." So, I come along and would love to have had them, and I was left out.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Your mother was the teacher or someone else?

Ron Behar: My mother, what?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Was she the piano teacher?

Ron Behar: No, no, no. She hired a piano teacher at 59 Pennard Road, which is where we lived, in Shepherds Bush, London.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Okay, will you describe your house? What did it look like?

Ron Behar: It was a row house, all brick, as most of them are in England, and stuck together, you know, semi-detached, they call it here. But yes, you had a very close relationship to the neighbors.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Did you have your own room?

Ron Behar: Yes, I did, and that was very nice. I had my own room. Of course, the two older sisters were married and already off by the time I was, you know, around. So, I had my own room, and in fact, that was the first room that caught fire when the Nazis bombed us in the Second World War with firebombs, and we were in a shelter in the house, a shelter designed by a minister of England who shipped out steel tables for people to sleep under. Instead of their dining room tables, you'd put this table in there and mattress on the bottom, and everybody slept on it, and it was nice. We were sleeping in there when somebody was banging at

our front door very loudly and screaming, "Your house is on fire. Get out!" And, so, we came out of the room and looked up the stairs, and my room was the first room, and flames were shooting out of the bedroom. And my mother didn't want to leave. She hung on to the stairs and wanted to go up and get her things and all her wonderful wedding gifts and everything, and we had to drag her out, literally drag her out of the house into the street, and the entire street was ablaze. Every house, there wasn't one house that wasn't burning because they had dropped an entire basket, huge basket of incendiary bombs that scattered all over. I think they were trying to hit the railroad that ran behind my house, and so yes, we had to, to run out in the street. We were in the street, me and my little sister, nowhere to go, so some neighbors grabbed us and pulled us into their house, into the backyard where they had a shelter, a dugout shelter in the ground. And we slept there all night, and we got up the next morning and walked to our house, and there was nothing but four brick walls, nothing left, not a thing. Yes, it was very tragic, mostly for my mother because of all her wedding gifts and wedding, she had an enormous wedding, so that was it. Then the London County Council makes an effort in finding us places to live, and we moved around, but eventually we found a little flat in London that somebody was allowing us to use, and that's where we spent, I don't know, the next couple of years. The war went on until 1945, and it started in '39, which was very surprising because my mother had a brother, Jack, and he told us before this all happened that he wanted us to come down to the coast to a home he had down there and spend the summer there. This was like August or September, and we did. We all got in his big English Lagonda, which is a very rare car, they don't make them anymore. And we went down to the coast, I think it was Worthing, which is a small town on the English southern coast. And as soon as we got there, the news came on the radio that Britain had declared war because Hitler had declared war on us. And so, my uncle comes into the room and says, "Pack up, we're going home." We hadn't even been there 24 hours. And so, we packed up everything and raced back to London, and me, a young kid of, well, very young, five years old probably, expecting to see huge damage and bombing and everything. There was nothing, nothing going on at all. They didn't attack or bomb us or do anything for nearly over a year. So, they called it the phony war, but eventually it wasn't phony anymore.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: How did your parents explain to you what was happening?

Ron Behar: Well, first of all, we had a newspaper every day, The Daily Mirror. And I could see the newspaper, my dad would read it and tell everybody what's going on. And, you know, we think there might be a war, we think, we hope not, but it's possible. And all those times that we didn't expect it to happen, but it did. And they just explained it to me, just like the newspapers did. For some reason, to be honest, I don't know why I wasn't scared. It wasn't frightening at all. Just losing my vacation down there was the most upsetting thing. I used to love going to Worthing and to the beach, even though it's not sandy, it's all pebbles. But it was a fun time to be with my sister and mom, and not dad, he had to work. So as far as explaining it, they really didn't have to.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: What about, did they talk about the relationship of Jewishness to the war, or as your...

Ron Behar: At that point in time, I had already experienced the antisemitism in England. Coming from...Sir-what's his name? Gosh, I wish I could remember. Sir Oswald Mosley, M-O-S-L-E-Y. He was the leader of the Nazi Party in Great Britain. And he came to our neighborhood because we were a pretty low-end neighborhood. And that's where they were getting their support from, was from the working class. And he came marching down our street. And I'm standing outside, this little kid, five-year-old, or six, maybe. And they came down, and my brother was across the street, and two of the hooligans from the Nazi group started beating him up. And there's nothing I could do at six years old. But a policeman came, followed these guys down the street, broke it up, and chased them away. And that was my first experience of real antisemitism. I only ever had another experience later in school, but nothing serious.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Was your brother okay?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: My brother was okay. Yes, it was my brother.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes, I'm sorry.

Ron Behar: Yes, he was okay, but he never forgot that. And that's why he signed up and volunteered to go to the Royal Air Force and when the war broke out.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: Well, the war obviously hadn't broke out when the Mosleyites were marching down our street. They were just hoping for a turnover, get rid of the King, get rid of the Queen. You know, they wanted some horrible fascist society.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Okay, so I want to roll back a little bit and hear a little more about your mother. Will you tell me her name, where she's from and what it was like to grow up with her?

Ron Behar: Yes, strangely enough, only recently I've seen papers because when she came to England, she was basically an alien. And she was born in Thessalonica, Greece, as was all that side of the family. My father was born in Istanbul, Turkey. But my mother came with a huge family and my mother's name was Allegra. And her maiden name was Benardout, which was the family name going back a long time. Yes, so there were seven brothers. And two sisters, two, maybe three, I'm not sure I can name them. And I can always name my mother's brothers because they spent a lot of time at our house, even though they had beautiful, elegant homes of their own. They really loved my mother, and she was the oldest one. She was the first born and she was born deaf, completely deaf. And if you can imagine how difficult that was raising children in a house, we never understood how she knew when they were crying. She couldn't hear them, but she'd run upstairs and I'd say, "Where are you going?" She'd say, "Oh, the baby's crying." So. That was interesting.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: That's amazing. Did she-was there sign language or how?

Ron Behar: Yes, a little bit of sign language, a little bit of lip. What do you call it? [Lip reading.] Yes, lip reading. And we all little kids, we just pull on her skirt when we wanted her attention. Yeah, it's amazing how you grow up like that and not find it difficult at all. The only difficult thing I had with my mother was when she would take me to school. And she would speak Spanish to me, and I would tug her and say, "Speak English, speak English." Not because I didn't understand, but I was embarrassed. I wanted to be like everybody else. Natural.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Was she speaking Spanish or Ladino?

Ron Behar: Ladino.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: Yes. I call it Spanish. [Yes.] It really is Spanish from the 14th century. That's all. And that's how it worked out. And I would understand everything she asked me or told me, even when she yelled at me. Ladino. I got that. So, yes, it was a-it was a very loving home.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Were there other languages spoken around you? Did your dad speak Turkish?

Ron Behar: Yes, he did speak Turkish, but not to us. And I remember many years later, after I'd been in America for 10 years, I made a lot of money, and I went back home, and I said, "Dad, I want to take you back to Istanbul. I want you to go back there." And he looked at me and he said, "Absolutely not." He hated it. I said, "Why not, Dad?" "I've got nothing there. I don't want to have anything to do with it." Well, the reason was that when he left, he actually ran away because they were trying to drag him into the military to fight the British. And so, it was odd, but I didn't know all that at the time. Yes, he ran away, he ran from Istanbul to Paris and then on to London. And the reason he went to London is that he heard there were a lot of Turkinos, they call them Turkinos, and Ladino people speaking there. Even though he was born in Turkey and my mother was born in Greece, they both spoke Ladino. Because the original place was a little town in Spain called Bihari or something. I don't know. I think that's where they got their name from.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I see. Okay, interesting.

Ron Behar: My father would never discuss his past. Never. He just wanted me to know what was going on right now. He helped me with many things. He taught me how to weave Persian rugs, how to repair Persian tapestries, and all kinds of things.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: So, he worked in the rug business, that's true?

Ron Behar: Yes. He worked for my grandfather at first. And he was the manager at the Anglo-Persian Carpet Company in South Kensington, which is in London. And, as a matter of fact, if you go there today, there's no store there, but there's a big, huge marble plaque up. And it says Anglo-Persian Carpet Company, 1911 or something. I don't know. It's still there. I've been back there several times.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Can you tell me a little about the about the trade? So, like, what did he do? Like, did they import? Did they weave? Did they repair?

Ron Behar: Mostly. Okay, I'll tell you, the store, the Anglo-Persian Carpet Company, had a collection of the most rare antique rugs, that you could ever have. Just the really old, the really good ones, the really fine ones. And, and there was a huge market for it at that time. We supplied people like Lord Macmillan, who was the Prime Minister of England at a time. In fact, I can remember an incident when one of the times that I visited, Dad was sick and he asked me to go into the store, his little store, and look after it, answer the phone. Well, I went and I'm sitting there and the phone rings and I pick it up and I said, "Can I help you? This is Behar

Carpets." And he said, "Is Jack Behar there?" And I said, "No, I'm sorry. He's in the hospital at the moment. He's having some treatment." "Oh, I'm so sorry," person said. "This is Lord and Lady Macmillan, Prime Minister of England. And will you give him our regards?" I was shocked. I didn't know my dad knew these kinds of people. But, you know, in the business that they're in, it's a very rare business. Most of the time the goods came from auction rooms and old houses, and there are a lot of those in England, as you probably know. They're all over the place. In fact, when I was working at the Anglo-Persian Carpet Company myself, my Uncle Sam used to take me to all these homes all over England and we would pick up rugs that needed work. And we would come home with the Riley Auto Car loaded up with rugs from all these different beautiful homes. And we would repair them, clean them and take them back. I even went into Buckingham Palace to work at one point, so that was a very fascinating time. Kept very quiet, but yes, it's the kind of place where you don't make a lot of noise.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: That's amazing.

Ron Behar: But what was funny about it, I was old enough to be a clown. So, I was a young kid working there, learning the trade. I think I was 14 or 15, and I couldn't go to college. My parents couldn't afford it. So, I went to work, and we were called by Buckingham Palace to go there to look at some rugs. Well, I thought I was going to make a thing out of this. So I sat in the back of the car-the passenger seat-and just like the Queen does, as we drove through the gates, there were all these people on either side trying to see who it is. I'm waving like I'm royalty. [Laughing] Oh, it was very funny. [Ruth laughing] My uncle didn't think it was so funny, but I thought it was hilarious. And we went in there and drove straight through the palace, straight into the ballroom. Yes. But that went on for several years that I did that.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes. How old do you think you were when you first started helping out at the carpet business?

Ron Behar: And I was fifteen.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Okay, so the war years, it sounds like you were five when the war began, and that would have made you 39, 40, 41.

Ron Behar: Our war ended in 1945.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes, so you were maybe like 11.

Ron Behar: That's right. Okay.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Did you go to, does that mean you missed elementary school, or how did that all work? Did you go to school? And if so, where?

Ron Behar: We went to school for the entire war; except we had to be home at night in the evening. And the way we went to school was kind of amusing. We had to take gas masks. And over our shoulder and backpack with some spare clothes just in case, and we marched to school, we walked. I say we, but my sister and I were at different times. She was two years older than me. And so, we walked to school with the masks. We came home with the masks. We never let them out of our sight because the Germans were using gas. And even though I don't know of an occasion where they dropped it in London, I'd heard stories of them using gas. They used the firebombs. And that was then. And that, you know, when the war was over, of course, we thought everything would get back to normal. But of course, it doesn't. You're still on rationing. You get two ounces of sugar a week. You get four ounces of meat, something like that. Everything was on a ration card, and you couldn't get more. So, my dad, because he had a big family, used to go on the black market. And the black market, you'd pay extra to get a chicken or something nice or a bottle of olive oil, any of those things that usually are imported. It was the import that was so difficult because they were sinking all of our ships, and the ships that were coming from America and Europe to feed us. And they were trying to starve us out by sinking all the ships. But they didn't manage, thank goodness.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Do you remember being hungry as a kid during those times?

Ron Behar: No, no. My mother was a wonderful cook, and she could make anything from anything. And I'll tell you, we ate an awful lot of beans, a lot of beans. Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: How did she prepare the beans?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Oh, she cooked them up the old Spanish way, like, like they actually do in Spanish restaurants. Yes, they were haricot beans. That was the name of the bean. And yes, she cooked them up. And if we have a little tiny piece of meat or a tiny piece of chicken, it was always wonderful. But we survived the war. We were bombed in the house. We weren't bombed in the houses that the government gave us, fortunately. The amazing thing is that after our house was bombed, we thought that it would

take the whole war to end before we'd get our house back, if ever. But no, the British government starts rebuilding right away the houses that were bombed. And they started rebuilding our house. I used to walk down there on my way to school and look at it every day. And it was wonderful. It was being built. The problem was that when it was finished and they were just doing touch-up, the Germans started with the V2 rocket. I don't know if you know what the V2 is, but you've heard of Wernher Von Braun. He designed the V2 rocket. It's the one we used to go to the moon. I mean, he's still using his stuff. Well, the Germans were in Belgium, and they were firing these rockets from a place called Peenemunde. And the rockets would come over, and they would hit big targets like big, big buildings. Unfortunately, there was a railroad right behind our house. And so when the rocket hit the railroad, the explosion blew the whole new roof off of my house. So, you know, that was it. We had to start all over again, building the roof. But eventually we got back in. I think after the war was over.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Can you describe the houses that the government gave you to stay in?

Ron Behar: Oh, they didn't build anything. They just asked people who were very generous. They asked people, "Are you in your home?" A lot of wealthy people never stayed in London. They weren't stupid. I mean, the wealthy people took off, and they had summer homes and winter homes. And, you know, they went everywhere, Switzerland or wherever. So, there were a lot of empty homes. And we picked up on those. We stayed in a lovely little house, it wasn't big, but it was a nice house. And I stayed in there and continued going to school. And by the end of the war, my brother, who was stationed in Germany, was one of the soldiers who opened up Auschwitz. You know about Auschwitz?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: Yes, of course you do. I knew about it firsthand because my brother fell in love with a lady who got out of there. She was Romanian. Her name was Eva Herskovits. And she came to England after a terrible time in the camp. And it was very difficult dealing with somebody like that, because they just didn't understand this happy-go-lucky group of kids and family. She hadn't experienced that for years. Now, the reason she'd survived is because Romania was on the side of the Nazis in the beginning, as was Hungary. And so, she was on a school trip from Hungary-to Hungary, sorry, from Romania. And when the Nazis decided that Hungary was not our ally anymore, and they marched in, and they took her, not any of the other kids, but they took her and put her in the camp. So, she was lucky. The reason I say that is because, being that they were allies of the Nazis, they didn't get into the war until two years before the end. So, they didn't get a chance to destroy the people as easily. They killed a lot of them, but she survived. And she's had lots of kids, and she's a wonderful example of absolute survival. What did you ask me? I forgot.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Well, you were talking about the places that your family stayed while you were waiting for your home to be rebuilt.

Ron Behar: Yes, we kept going to look at them every day to see if it was finished, but we only got to move once. And that was okay. You know, we lost everything in that fire.

Ron Behar: When I say everything, I mean that we didn't have a stick out of that place, not a handkerchief, not underwear, not clothing, not a saucepan, not a thing. Every piece of furniture was gone. So, you can imagine we really didn't have anything to worry about. Well, we did. Yes. We had to buy new clothes and get new clothes. But that's what my mother was so good at: creating clothes for me.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Did she sew clothes for you?

Ron Behar: Yes, she sewed them for me. She even made my bathing suit when I was a little older because I was on a swim team. And, you know, never told the kids my mother made this. You're always a little embarrassed, but she made tons of our clothes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: That's amazing.

Ron Behar: She was a spectacular woman, totally deaf and amazing.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes. I'm curious about holidays. What kinds of holidays or family traditions did you all keep up when you were growing up?

Ron Behar: Oh, we celebrated all the Jewish holidays, Passover, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, you name it. And we belonged to a wonderful Sephardic synagogue called the Holland Park. It was called the... Well, it was in Holland Park, it was in a very lovely neighborhood, small synagogue where I was bar mitzvahed and where I went back after I was a grown man and they called me up again and I did that. It was a real thrill to be in the same spot 50 years later.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Oh, yes.

Ron Behar: The synagogue... I'm just having a little tough time remembering. Oh, I know. [Speaking to son off camera] Yes, Jay, thank you. It was the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Holland Park. Yes, I didn't know any Portuguese people, but that name survived. Yes. Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: So did you do most holidays at the synagogue, or did you do holidays at home as well?

Ron Behar: We did them at home, both in the synagogue and at home.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes. And what do you remember? Any dishes or special traditions or...

Ron Behar: Oh, my God. My mother was a wonderful cook. She made us borekas, bolemas. [Speaking to son off camera] What else, Jay? What? What? Yes, the ones with the spinach. I love those the best. What do you call them? You must know.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I'm not sure.

Ron Behar: Quisado.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Okay. I don't know Sephardic food that well.

Ron Behar: It's bolemas, borekas, quisado. And that's about it. But everything else that went along with it.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: And we had that in a big, huge table in our living room.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: And the whole family would come?

Ron Behar: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: A big table?

Ron Behar: A big table. My dad would sing Turkish songs.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Oh, yes?

Ron Behar: Yes. What songs do you remember? I don't remember any of them. I only remember Turkish swear words, which I can't repeat here because somebody might get offended.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: [laughing] Fair enough. Were they Jewish songs?

Ron Behar: Oh, yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I see.

Ron Behar: They were Sephardic songs.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I see.

Ron Behar: Ein Kelohanu. Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: What do you remember? Like, what do you think was your favorite holiday as a kid?

Ron Behar: Hmm. Well, of course, when we got out of school in the summer, it was the most pleasurable because then I was absolutely in my glory. But I loved them all. Well, I didn't love Yom Kippur so much because we had to wait so long to eat.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: And so, yes, the new year was good. Rosh Hashanah was good. And of course, Pesah, which is what we call Passover, Pesah was the best. Yeah. All the best food.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: It's coming up.

Ron Behar: Yes, I guess it is. Yes, I'm going to Colorado to my son.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Oh, lovely. We've been recording about 40 minutes. Do you want to take a break or how are you feeling?

Ron Behar: Yeah, I'll take a break to finish my banana bread.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Okay, I'm going to press stop.

Ron Behar: Okay.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: And all right, can I have your consent to record this interview?

Ron Behar: Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thank you. You were going to say what the government did with the children?

Ron Behar: Once the bombing got so bad that we'd lost maybe 50,000 or 75,000 people and the Germans had concentrated on bombing London because we were trying to bomb Berlin if we could get there. So, the government decided that they wanted to have a second generation and so wanted to ship all the children out of town. And my mother consented, as all the other mothers did. Most of them did. Some of the people who refused were sorry they refused because London was bombed horribly. You look back at all the things that were bombed. It was just amazing, even the Houses of Parliament. And so, they decided to ship us off. At the time, the Germans had not taken over Norway. Sweden was neutral. But the Germans hadn't taken over Norway. So, the government said, "We'll ship you to Manchester." Nice big city, huge Jewish population there, which I didn't know at the time, but found out. And found us homes to live in with my sister and I. And so, we were shipped off at some point to Manchester. And if you can visualize going to King's Cross Station in London and the whole platform filled with young little kids, all with their backpacks. And it was very sad to see that. And I don't remember us crying. At least my sister said she doesn't remember. But I remember seeing my mom leave, leave us there. And that was horrifying to me. And they shipped us to Manchester. And we stayed in a home. And it was okay. But you know, you're very sad. You don't want to be there. You want to be at your home in London. So, we had to go to school. I lived in Manchester. Oh, gosh. Slipped my mind again, [Speaking off camera] Jay. It's a very famous area. Very big Jewish population there. And so, we actually went. We had a normal life there. We had a synagogue. We had school. We weren't very happy. You're never very happy when you're shipped out. But anyway, we stayed there.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: How long were you there for?

Ron Behar: Well, we were there for at least a year. I can't remember details. [Sure.] I was too young.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: But then the Germans invaded Norway. Now their planes had access to England.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I see.

Ron Behar: And they could reach Manchester, which was a huge industrial city, building planes, building steel. Everything was being built in and around Manchester. And so, they started to bomb. So, we had to get out of there. So once again, we shipped back to London, and the government found us another place. It was in Cambridge. And that was lovely. We stayed in Cambridge. It's lovely park-like atmosphere, beautiful streets, lovely school, very, very pleasant. It was a lovely place. And we used to walk to school and pick strawberries off the bushes. I remember that. That's amazing.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Do you remember reuniting with your mom?

Ron Behar: No. No. Only when we were in London.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Oh, I see. You went to Cambridge. And then, I see.

Ron Behar: By ourselves again, just the two of us. What's funny, though, is I remember the Oxford and Cambridge boat race. And we became Cambridge supporters, of course. And we'd walk to school. And we'd love it there. We really liked it there. It wasn't sad at all. But one time, my mother came to visit. She came to Cambridge on the bus or the train somehow. And the owner of the house, who is a lady that I'm living with, said to my mother, "Your children don't seem to know about church." Now, how do you like that? They had no idea we were Jewish. So, my mother, oh, oh, I know. okay, okay. My mother immediately packed us up and took us back to London to face the bombs rather than be converted. I mean, rather hilarious, actually, when you think about it. It was stunning. I mean, she took us back. And then the bombing got worse. And oh, God, it was really bad at night. You're terrified when the flying bombs come over. You can hear them. They were pilotless. And they made a certain kind of noise. And it was a

droning, [mimics sound] waa-waa-waa-waa-waa-waa-waa. And you knew when that droning stopped that the bomb was about to come down. And you hoped that it wasn't going to come on your house because you didn't know where it was going to land. But it landed all over Shepherd's Bush and different places. And we were fortunate it didn't hit us. Anyway, my mother decided right away, I'm shipping you out again, this time to Cornwall. You heard of Cornwall?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Mm-hmm [affirmative]

Ron Behar: To a little town famous in stories called St. Ives. And St. Ives is just outside um, um, Cornwall-Penzance. Penzance is the main city where the Pirates of Penzance, you may have heard of them, very famous. You haven't heard of them. You'd better read a little more. And yeah, the Pirates of Penzance, they were famous because Penzance was the very tip of England as far west as you could go. And if you look at a map, you'll see it. And you'll see St. Ives, a tiny, tiny little village. And we just adored it there. Mom left us there. We were quite happy. That was another place where strawberries were growing along the road. And we went to school. We walked to school and back and forth and back and forth. And then, as the war was coming to a close, not ended, but coming to a close, my brother, Sammy, who was in the Royal Air Force, he got some leave. And he wanted to come down and visit us. So, he came to Cornwall. And he came to Penzance and to St. Ives. And we all met there. He brought my mother with her because she was totally deaf and hardly spoke much English. So, when she saw us there and she checked back with London, and seeing that the bombing had stopped, that the Germans were being beat back, that they'd taken over Peenemunde where the rockets were coming from, that the Americans had invaded, the British had invaded, and the war was going to be over, eventually. So, mom said, "Let's bring them back to London. They're okay now." And so, she brought us back. So that was my experience with Cambridge and Cornwall, and Manchester.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes, quite a lot of places you, you went.

Ron Behar: Who knew we were going to go to those places? Who knew? It was amazing that the people in a lot of those places had no idea about Judaism, no idea at all. So we didn't bring it up. But my mother was aware of it. And when they asked her, "How come your kids don't know the Bible or whatever," She was talking about to my mom, my mom got scared. She, yes, packed us up, took us home.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes. I'm curious about a couple of things. One is, it sounds like everywhere you go, you are re-enrolled in the local school, and you just jump right in. How did that work? Did your education remain consistent somehow?

Ron Behar: Well, pretty much. Not great. I mean, it was pretty consistent. I think the British Government informed the school district. Someone from the British Government informed the school district where we were at. But they pretty well knew. Everybody the same age in England has the same schooling. And then, of course, we were too young to leave school. So, they kept us going. It wasn't that difficult. They never gave us homework that was too hard. We were out of our element. I mean, we weren't at home. We were lodged.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes, and who were the people who were taking care of you? Do you remember any of them?

Ron Behar: Oh, yes, I remember lots of them. I remember, well, I shouldn't say that. I remember the ones in Cambridge. I definitely remember the ones in Cornwall. They were very nice to us. They were just, I don't want to say in a rude way, but they were just ignorant. They were country people who were offering their homes to save lives. And that was a wonderful thing they were doing. So, we couldn't do anything but appreciate that. We weren't going to complain, even though I hated the food some of the people gave us. Oh, my God, cooked marrow and stuff like horrible stuff. But we had nothing else to eat. So, there you go. We learned the hard way.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes, and then I'm curious about communication. It sounds like you were able to keep in touch with your family. How did you communicate?

Ron Behar: Not by phone. No, only if they came to visit. Oh, yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: No letters, no telegrams, just?

Ron Behar: I'm sure there were letters. [Okay.] I've always loved writing letters, and I'm sure that came from that habit. Yes, I've written letters all my life. But yes, I don't know. There wasn't much communication. And of course, the people in London, our family, it was scary for them to go on a train because the Nazis were bombing every bloody railroad they could.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: I mean, they thought they had us beat, and they really did. We were in terrible shape. We had no army. We lost all

those people at Dunkirk. You must know about that story. Invaded and then got trapped there. I mean, that was half of our military. So, we weren't in very good shape. But we had a wonderful Royal Air Force. That's why I volunteered for the Royal Air Force later. But the Royal Air Force had their Spitfires and Hurricanes and all these bombers that used to blow the German planes out of the sky. They were much faster. They were more maneuverability. And it was a good thing. I swear, if it wasn't for the Air Force, the war would never have ended. They would have invaded. They were afraid to come across the Channel because they would have been sunk every boat by the Royal Air Force.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Okay, tell me a little bit about the years after the war. Or no, tell me about when the war ended. What do you remember about learning the fact that it was closing up and things like that?

Ron Behar: Well, the first thing I learned was that sugar had been taken off of rationing. I mean, it's unbelievable how you miss something when it's banned. And it was banned because of the ships being sunk and torpedoed. Terrible loss of life, really huge. And ships and men in that English Channel, man, there's no way you could defend it against a huge German army. But yes, I remember my mother saying, "You can get sweets now." To us, you call it candy. We call them sweets, Okay? So, I grabbed her by the arm. I said, "Come on, let's go get some sweets." Well, every store was completely sold out, gone, except a little bag of boiled sweets. Oh, my God. I said, "This is it. Oh, Mom, I want some real sweets." Well, then we started to get bananas. And that was bloody amazing. I mean, everything we got, we treated like a treasure. Any kind of candy, any kind. Yes. I'm trying to remember some specifics, but I don't remember our first chocolate bar. I'm nuts about chocolate, ever since the war. And I don't know. I don't know what I remember. Well, the rationing was still on. And oh, I'll tell you something that you've probably never heard about. As the war continued, meat was impossible. The butcher, you walk in there, and he says, "Sorry, I'm out of meat. I have nothing." Obviously, except for themselves, I'm sure. But we had no meat. So, what did we have to eat? Horse meat. Sounds terrible. But we ate it. I remember exactly where my mother got it. I went with her. It was like a little stall in the market. And oh, there are horrible big chunks of horse meat there. And she brought it home and cooked it for us. And we ate it, but not something I remember with glee.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: So those were memories of the war ending.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: And what else? Trying to think how old I was...1945, I must have been...

Ron Behar: I think 11 was what we said.

Ron Behar: 11, okay.

Ron Behar: Or maybe 12, depending. Do you remember there being a definitive day that you were like, this is it? The war is over. Or did it kind of fade?

Ron Behar: Oh, yes. Well, we ran out into the street and screamed and yelled. And all the buddies, all our friends that lived on the street, Kenneth Hutchins, Paul Lewis, all these people that lived on our street and were all Jewish, all came out waving arms around and giving us a hug and whatever.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: I don't remember specifics.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Was your neighborhood very Jewish?

Ron Behar: There were at least one, two, three, four, five, six, and about seven homes on the street. That is like a quarter of them. [coughing -Oh, God, I'm choking.] A street is a quarter mile long. It's bounded on-Excuse me, I've got to get some water.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Take your time. Yes, yes, take your time. Yes, yes, take a break.

Ron Behar: Oh, dear. Oh. Oh. Yes. What was I telling you?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I've asked you if you were in a Jewish neighborhood, and you were kind of describing that like seven or eight houses on the street were maybe Jewish families.

Ron Behar: You realize every house is attached. You've seen those row homes, I'm sure. [Yes.] In Europe.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: It was about a quarter mile long. And it was bordered on one end by a main road that led to the West End, and on the other side, another main road that led somewhere else. But yes, that was it. But there were houses on that street, on both sides of the street.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: And that's, I think, why those incendiary bombs did so much damage. Because they're all stuck together.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes. I'm curious about whether you, you know, as the war is ending, you're coming into, you know, you're becoming a teenager almost. You're approaching 13. Were there any particular goals or dreams that you remember having at that age?

Ron Behar: Having a bar mitzvah.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Looking forward to it?

Ron Behar: No, but. [laughing] No, but I knew there wasn't going to be any big parties. We had no money. [Yes.] Very different, very different than what they do today. They hate the Olympic Hotel. They don't do, we didn't do any of that. We were lucky if we got a fountain pen, you know, as a gift. That was a big gift.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Yes.

Ron Behar: A nice, classy fountain pen. [Yes.] I had to go for lessons for my bar mitzvah. And the Rabbi was really mean to me. When I made a mistake, he would hit me with a ruler on my hands. Can't do that in America. And it was very tough. I mean, I was crying at times. And I told my mother, she said, "You still got to do it. You've got to do it, Ronnie. You've got to do it." I said, "Okay I'll do it. But boy, I hate it." And so, I have no pleasure thinking about my bar mitzvah. Not at all. Now, as I got a little bit older, 13, 14, 15 maybe, I had parties at my house and music parties. I invited the guys, and we had a lot of fun. So that was a really good time. But when you talk about the bar mitzvah, no, it wasn't something I looked forward to. And I don't envy anybody doing it. I'm not a religious person.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Say it again?

Ron Behar: I'm not a religious person, even though my whole family were. I'm sure you can understand why after the Second World War. There's nothing to be thankful for except surviving. Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: We're at almost 25 minutes. Do you want to kind of wrap it up here, and we can schedule our next session?

Ron Behar: Yes, yes. I'm going to lose my voice. I know.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: It's a lot of work. It's a lot of work. Yes. You're doing great. You're really, this is a great interview. I'm going to press stop now.

Ron Behar: Okay, then. Thank you.